Applegate Valley Historical Society
15050 Hwy 238
CPO Box 3122
Applegate, Oregon 97530

March 2006 Newsletter

Hope this finds everyone surviving the winter months. With looking at some of the flowers that are breaking the surface, I would say that Spring is on its way.

We are getting ready to open the museum for the season. I would like to thank Norm Robinson for the framed picture of Chester Kubli that we will have displayed at the museum. The Kubli family lived in Applegate for many years.

Part of the display at the museum will feature a long time resident of Applegate. She was very instrumental in all the organizations that she was involved in, Grange, school, church, 4 – H, just to name a few. The display will have many pictures of her life including the some of the awards she's received, Century Ranch, Agriculture Diamond Pioneer Award, Oregon State PTA lifetime member. She has given us a few articles for our newsletter and is a very very special lady. Yes, you guessed it; her name is Beryl Elmore.

I would like to thank Alice Matheny for this month's article. Also for the suggestion of doing the feature on Beryl. I hope you have the chance to stop and take a look at it.

We have a meeting this month on Saturday March 18, 2006 at the Museum at 10:00 AM. Please remember to bring your chair.

See you the 18th at 10:00AM.

Respectfully,
Barbara Niedermeyer
lovekoalas@peoplepc.com
AVHS Sect./Tres.

HOW HIGH'S THE WATER?

—by Alice Matheny—

This last winter's heavy rainfall, soggy pastures, drowned bridges and other water woes are nothing new, historically. Longtime Applegate resident Wes Offenbacher remembers the January day in 1953 when he and his dad, Lance Offenbacher, took an unplanned swim in the flood-swollen Applegate River after Herman Offenbacher's covered bridge was swept out from under them. (Herman's bridge was a 195-foot long span about four miles upriver from the community of Applegate.)

"I ended up clinging to a tree a little ways downstream and Dad washed down with the bridge about three-quarters of a mile, ending up sitting in a tree surrounded by water."

When the two men first walked out on the bridge the dogs had turned around and left. "Smart," Wes commented, "the men stayed and the bridge washed out. The water would suck me under, then I'd pop up, then down again, back and forth." To add to the problem, Wes was wearing knee boots and his father was in hip waders.

Nobody saw the two men at first, then it got dark. Bob Messenger finally spotted Wes, threw him a rope, and Wes made it to shore. "I thought we'd never see Dad again," Wes commented over fifty years later. But his father, Lance, was very much alive downriver, where he yelled until Applegate resident Dana Gearhart heard him from her house. She "sounded the alarm", eventually drawing the first set of rescuers. Norm Kubli, Bob Darling, and Tom Pittock launched a ten-foot boat which promptly capsized and was lost in the debris-filled water.

Now the rescuers needed to be rescued and were perched in trees, themselves. Hours later, Grants Pass river guide Pres Pyle and Nate Smith, along with Cole Rivers (Game Commission biologist) launched another boat and effected a daring rescue of everyone. All told, more than 300 volunteers plus state police had assembled to help the stranded men.

All was well with rescued and rescuers, and the next day Lance Offenbacher was able to retrieve his hip waders from the tree where he had hung them the night before, the Applegate River now having dropped several feet overnight.

Four years earlier, in February of 1949, the Medford Mail Tribune headlined wet and wild winter weather on the paper's front page. Snow blocked mountain passes in Washington state while melted snow and heavy rains created a "serious flood threat" for the Rogue and Klamath Rivers. Page seven of that same issue found that some people blamed the record-breaking winter on, no, not global warming but on "war games in the far North, atomic bomb testing in the Pacific, dry ice, radar, and the cannonading of World Wars I and II." (Medford Mail Tribune)

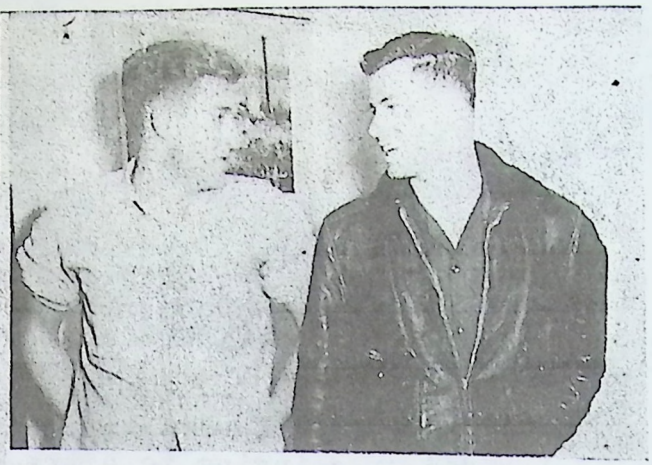
The weather bureau that year, however, concluded that they just couldn't rightly say what did cause 1949's wet misery, aside from just too much rain.

SOURCES:

Grants Pass Daily Courier, Jan. 19, 1953.

Medford Mail Tribune, Feb. 22, 1949, pages 1. and 7.

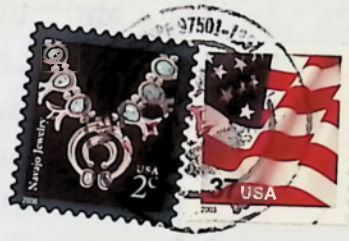
Wes Offenbacher and Dutch Offenbacher, personal interviews January, 2006.



At upper left with hand on forehead is Cole Rivers, rescuer, Norm Kubli, rescued, Nate Smith, rescuer, and Lance Offenbacher, with big smile and hand extended. At upper right are Wes Offenbacher and Norm Kubli. At lower left are Pres Pyle, standing, and Cole Rivers, seated in the second boat to go to the aid of the victims. (Courier photos)

The morning after the rescue Offenbacher family members gathered in front of the collapsed bridge. L. to R. Leon Offenbacher holding Karen Phipps, Kathryn Offenbacher Wheeler, Rosie Offenbacher Phipps (Lance's daughter). (Photo courtesy of Wes and Bette Offenbacher)

APPLEGATE VALLEY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY
CPO BOX 3122
APPLEGATE, OR 97530



Upper Rogue Hist. Soc.
P O Box 245
Trail OR 97541